

THE INVASION OF MONTE VANCO—By Stephen French Whitman

THE principality of Monte Vanco, that assiduously worshipped shrine of the twin goddesses Ronge and Noir, appeared on the map like the back of a fat hand, its contour on three sides defined by the French boundary line, its knuckled by the rocky declivity of the Azure coast, its stubby forefinger a promontory plunging into the Mediterranean sea.

On the point of a headland stood the castle of the Prince, a gentleman farmer for his large fortune and fine instincts, at the moment engaged in augmenting his collection of orchids by means of an aeroplane voyage over the jungles of Habewene, in equatorial Africa. From the gates of the castle there dripped down the promontory the neat little village of Monte Vanco—one crooked street lined with houses of white walls and red roofs. On the back of the hand, as it were, the gardens lay, with flower beds, palm trees and a land stand.

To the south, all white against the rich blue of the sea, stood the rambling casino, adjoined with classic pillars and noticeably pagan statuary. To the north, all pink against the purple of the Maritime Alps, rose the facade of the Hotel des Deux Hemispheres, looking like a poor relation of the Chateau de Versailles. To the west lay the arcade, containing the shop of the jeweller and the Grand Magasin de Paris. To the east there filled the eye the rococo architecture, striped awnings and profuse fern pots of the Cafe Superbe.

On the terrace of this last resort at a round table decorated with two empty glasses sat two American young men of engaging visage, elegantly arrayed against the evening. It was that hour of serenity and gold which precedes sunset. Indeed, twilight was already hovering tentatively on the rim of the world, and its first almost imperceptible softness, its vague promises of tender melancholy, seemed to find subtle reflection in the faces of those silent youths, their eyes at vacant gaze, the corners of their mouths adroop. Now and then one of them sighed or pessimistically smiled.

Finally the tall, slender one, whose name was Mr. Pengwynne, uttered with an intonation of sadness:

"See, Tubby, how our beautiful day begins to fade. It steals forth from the gardens—mauve shadows invade all the shrubbery; it slips from the tips of palm trees and the roofs—a dun haze takes its place; from the far off mountain summits gently it withdraws and dusk descends between us and the snow peaks. Drop a tear, Tubby, we are losing our fair world."

"Just as the day departs, so pleasure passes. Ah, the sapphire sea, the amethystine peaks, the dazzling ether intervening like a sun drenched field! Dark falls on them, as the sad twilight of monotony is always falling at the end of gaiety. Why cannot lovely hours last? How evanescent are all the truly golden moments! How soon is everything delectable used up! Water, duplicate these orders!"

Mr. Tubbal, the short, chubby one—who by all this rendered so despondent that he has sunk gradually lower and lower till chin rested upon breast and the woe of the whole world seemed piled upon his shoulders—huskily replied:

"How true! What is there here in Monte Vanco, for example, after a month of it, that can give a filip to the hearts of two poor disenchanted ones? Gwynnie, I can prognosticate every movement that every soul in the principality will make to-night. The dinner hour approaches; this cafe and the Restaurant des Deux Hemispheres will fill; the maître d'hotel will smile and mince among the tables; ladies will preen themselves and condescend to flirt with you and me; the orchestra will dish up, in a gush of blares, the march from 'Aida'; coffee and cigars will make their familiar incense on the terraces; and soon, with unexcited eyes, we shall see the strings of colored lights ripple forth throughout the gardens."

"Then on to the casino—the monotonous croaking of the croupiers, the perpetual chink and shiver of louis d'or. So on, ad infinitum. The commonplace, the stale, the wearisome! Ah, to burst through it with a desperate rush to bring it crashing down in ruins, to be able to cry out exultantly, 'I have settled your business for you, Monsieur Emu!'"

With a threatening gesture Mr. Tubbal relapsed into his mournful attitude, at last adding, in a bitter voice:

"For my part, I confess that I can see no more in life to-night. The motor car to Marseilles, say I; the first boat home; and for the rest, a decent quiet corner by the club window, where I may end my days contemplating on the foggy avenue at night the foolish, fond young people, fattening by in search of that ignis fatuus they call pleasure. He stopped, something glistened in his eye.

Mr. Pengwynne, after serious reflection, calmly made answer:

"Tubby, I admire much that you have said, but to one idea of yours I take exception. The situation is our fault. At the heart of everything there lurks the possibility of anything—! mean, that corner of the world apparently the dullest contains as many germs of frenetic excitement as any. This evening Monte Vanco bore as both to groans; yet, believe me, if I could lay tongue to the tails—manned word I should transform this place into the dreams of the most unbalanced sinner after novelty. Alas, if I did know that word!"

"Hark," exclaimed Mr. Tubbal, lifting his pomp chin.

Through the still air floated the sweet call of a bugle. In the falling gold of the sunset, beyond the northern edge of the gardens, upon a stretch of lawn that reached to the French boundary line, two dusty uniforms of soldiers in dark blue uniform and tan shanters were stacking up and down the lawn.

"See that?" cried Mr. Tubbal. "See those fellows on the march; poor fellows, they saw the pretty lawn, and now they are going to eat their little supper off of it. I am right, mark them, they are going to eat their little supper off of it. Shall we stroll up and watch them?"

Mr. Pengwynne, a young man who took much pleasure in the sort of

thought which might occur to any one, paid not the slightest heed to that proposal. His eyes were shrewdly averted, his lips were compressed, his nostrils were expanded—he was thinking.

"Look here, do you not see what they have done? They have stepped over the boundary line. They have marched off the French road, under arms, into this principality. They have invaded Monte Vanco!"

Each gentleman rising slowly to his feet stared at the other—Mr. Pengwynne with intense, grim significance, and Mr. Tubbal with a look in which incredulity was struggling with rapture. Then Mr. Pengwynne, with that calmness which comes to all great personalities in momentous crises, pronounced solemnly:

"Sir, this means war."

"Great heavens!" gasped Mr. Tubbal, falling back. "What genius!"

Mr. Pengwynne, finger on chin, eyes shut, considered rapidly. Slowly a bright light filled his face. He beamed on his companion.

"Tubby," said he, confidently, "come with me." Descending from the terrace of the Cafe Superbe they walked rapidly through the gardens to the casino. In the marble portico Mr. Pengwynne seized Mr. Tubbal by the arm and urgently exhorted him:

"Large events demand large manners; think, I pray you, of some famous man—say Bismarck—and look as much like him as possible. Fonderous dignity is the word. I wish you had put on your tail coat; you appear so violently cherubic in a dinner jacket. Well, well, at least look the weeniest bit truculent, if it is in you."

Mr. Tubbal obediently put on the resentful expression of an infant deprived of its bottle, and followed Mr. Pengwynne into the casino.

At the door of the director's private office they met, as he was issuing forth, M. Fripponet, a stout, dark, oily little man in top hat, frock coat, pearl colored trousers, gold watch chain and buttonhole bouquet. It was the bourgeois regent, as it were, and business manager of Monte Vanco.

"Good evening!" this personage vouchsafed genially while lighting a cigar. Alas, he was, perhaps, on his way to a good dinner.

"M. Fripponet, a word with you!" said Mr. Pengwynne, in a tone which caused the regent to stop short. A spasm of anxiety crossed his face. Stepping back into his office, beckoning to his two visitors, he softly closed the door.

"What is it?" he inquired in a whisper. "You have not come across another suicide?"

"I wish it were no worse," replied Mr. Pengwynne heavily. "Come, sir, you are a man of courage; prepare yourself. The blow has fallen!" And he pointed out of the window.

M. Fripponet managed, by placing his nose on a level with the window sill, to perceive through the fading palm trees of the gardens a far off haze of dark blue uniforms.

"Tien! That is droll. Soldiers, eh?"

"French soldiers, M. Fripponet."

"Well, parbleu, this is not the first time that I have seen French soldiers. What do they effect? Except that they undoubtedly have an independence to

lapsed regent's back, grasped his friend's free hand.

"I did not think you had it in you!" he ejaculated, sotto voce, in generous admiration.

"I didn't have it in me," answered Mr. Tubbal frankly, "till a moment ago."

"What are you saying?" groaned M. Fripponet, struggling free of Mr. Tubbal's arm. "A moment ago? A moment ago I was happy. I was contented. I was thinking of a good cauliflower soup and a rare fillet. Ah, misery! Pinch me. It is some ghastly dream!"

Said Mr. Pengwynne: "Yes, I grant you that it is horrible. But all is not yet lost."

"You believe?" sobbed M. Fripponet, electrified, so to speak, clutching Mr. Pengwynne by his silk lapels and peering up wildly into that diplomat's calm face.

"Sir, I believe that the United States of America can and will save you. What, do we not love liberty, we brothers of the free roaming redskins? Do we not boil with all our blood at the encroachments and insinuations of the tyrannical? Besides, between you and me, if this grabbing game once begins, suppose Japan, instead of picking out China, chose the Philippines? No, no, to preserve her, America should nip all in the bud, and save you now."

"But," he added quickly, "to excite my country there must be some sort of defence, a shout of resistance, heroism. What national tenderness for a gallant struggle in vain—a losing cause! Monsieur, you must meet blow with blow. To arms!"

Upon M. Fripponet's pallid countenance there were exhibited at last the courage of despair. Suddenly, slapping his forehead, he waddled to the door.

"Come!" he bellowed. He rushed out. The others followed.

They skipped across the flower beds, rapidly they left the purlieus of pleasure; they made for the promontory and the village street. It was a pretty little street, winding, ascending—at its top, against the almost extinguished old rose of the sky, the steep, black castle walls. The tiny windows of the cottages sent luminous beams of candle light into the dusk that was already thickening here; the half open doors exuded odors of good homey dinners. Midway of this charming alley M. Fripponet delivered upon a certain door some furious kicks.

"Baudet!" he bawled.

There rushed forth instantly an elderly, bald headed, long nosed, vacuous looking, dumfounded individual in his shirt sleeves, a napkin tucked under his chin, fork in hand, and his mouth full of food. This was the commandant of the police—in fine, the official military man of Monte Vanco. "Excellency!" gulped this honest creature.

"Baudet, we are invaded! Ring the alarm! Gather the gendarmes and the fire department! Warn the inhabitants! What imbecile, you still stand there? Off with you!"

In five minutes the town was uttering from the citadel a crazy clamor; through the village street doors were banging, shouts, screams, and oaths were echoing; everywhere mad, shadowy figures were skimming over

low, it is all true, and I shall prove it to you. Allow me, my papers—Wait, that is a hotel bill. Ah, here they are! No—the deuce! I have left them in the despatch box. But what difference? See for yourself, it has happened. And shall I tell you why?"

Mr. Tubbal, discovering a decanter of cognac on the mantel shelf, had humbly poured out a glassful for M. Fripponet and was himself, for politeness' sake, just emptying a second, when his air of intelligence increased prodigiously. He remonstrated with his friend, the while scattering covert and imploring winks:

"Gwynnie, your throat is getting tired; rest it for a moment. I feel quite capable of acquainting M. Fripponet with the causes leading up to this calamity."

Mr. Pengwynne hesitated, looked keenly at Mr. Tubbal, seemed reassured and said generously:

"Pray do so, then, my dear sir."

And M. Fripponet, who had begun

He peered cunningly at Messrs. Pengwynne and Tubbal, but, seeing on both faces the same commiseration, uttered an uncertain giggle.

"Come, now, what imagination!"

"You think?" cried Mr. Pengwynne, at that note of weakness instantaneously on the offensive. "Is it, then, imagination that armed troops are on your soil? Is it imagination that this is just the psychological moment for such a coup, when your prince is gallivanting after orchids in the middle of Africa? And am I and my colleague only imagining that we were told, a month ago, by our august superior, the Secretary of State at Washington, to hasten to Monte Vanco and, since we had no ambassador or consul there, be prepared to act for our travelling companions in any possible catastrophe?"

Mr. Tubbal, in the company of Mr. Pengwynne a very chameleon of the emotions, stepped forward with raised hand, threw his friend a burning glance of reproach and cried out:

"Ah, sir, what have you done? You have destroyed our incognito! You have blurted out a grave governmental secret!"

Mr. Pengwynne shrugged his shoulders precisely like a diplomat.

"Well, it was the proper time anyway, since the invasion has occurred. Yes, my poor Fripponet," said he, laying a hand kindly on that astounded person's shoulder: "Yes, my poor fel-

low, it is all true, and I shall prove it to you. Allow me, my papers—Wait, that is a hotel bill. Ah, here they are! No—the deuce! I have left them in the despatch box. But what difference? See for yourself, it has happened. And shall I tell you why?"

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to weaken at the knees, was rapidly informed by Mr. Tubbal:

"All Europe has been calm these six months, has it not? It was the calm before the storm. Was France asleep? Has she forgotten Alsace and Lorraine? Observe, now, what she has been plotting with her eyes shut."

"She seizes Monte Vanco. How easy! Austria, inflamed by France's deed, not to be outdone, seizes Servia. And Germany—is she to have nothing? She looks around. She seizes Switzerland. No time to pick and choose; she seizes Switzerland. Aha, we have some trouble here—Switzerland objects. And while Germany is so engaged, France is at her."

"So! But can it be stopped there? Hardly. Germany calls in Russia. This is England's chance. Russia's back turned, perfidious Albion is into Turkestan by way of India. No one is looking—Japan pounces upon China."

"Shall I go on? Armageddon? Helas, M. Fripponet, you will hear tonight, in Monte Vanco, the first gun of Armageddon. The fair map of the world is blackened; all continents are drenched in blood; and with a great sigh that reaches to the Red Star, five hundred million brave men give up their lives!"

"Nom de Dieu de Chenapan!" moaned M. Fripponet, reeling, saved from the floor only by Mr. Tubbal's arm. Mr. Pengwynne, behind the col-

lapsed regent's back, grasped his friend's free hand.

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the ground. On the steps of the Cafe Superbe all the waiters were huddled together; from the back windows of the casino the croupiers were nimbly jumping; in the arcade the hairdresser, the confectioner, the jeweller and the proprietor of the Grand Magasin de Paris were frantically clapping up their shutters.

And on the lawn at the northern end of the principality a large audience, composed of mystified amateurs from every pleasure loving nation, in evening dress, surrounded in a great circle the two companies of French mountain artillery, who, abashed by the interest they excited, mildly curious at the distant uproar, feeling instinctively, perhaps, that everything was not as it should be, were making haste to conclude their modest meal and take the road again.

II.

In the twilight, before the crumbling castle gates, amid a huddle of horror-stricken non-combatants, the army of Monte Vanco stood under arms.

There was, for heavy infantry, the gendarmes—a force of nine, in patent leather cocked hats, tailcoats of tender azure, white cross belts, duck trousers, and small, ornate swords meant for the beating of juvenile trespassers' pantaloons. Beside them, in the office of artillery, so to speak, were grouped the fire department—six fathers of families, their natural air

of humble domesticity disguised by their brass helmets. They had brought out—with foresight admirable amidst such confusion—their chemical engine.

On either side of these uniformed forces was arranged perhaps a score of full grown male inhabitants armed with various interesting utensils of offence. Foremost stood Baudet, the commandant, as well off for splendid trappings as a brigadier-general of the great Napoleon. But his features, like the features of his entire command, were disfigured with profound anxiety.

M. Fripponet, contemplating the array, was not himself quite free from that expression. In the faces of Mr. Pengwynne and Mr. Tubbal, who leaned together, arm in arm, beside him, were exhibited, on the contrary, the most intense confidence, courage and high purpose.

"Sir," said Mr. Pengwynne to M. Fripponet, "just as it stands this is a stirring sight. But can you afford to wait here longer? Kingdoms have been lost before this by a moment's vacillation. Action, quick action, is what the hour requires!"

Mr. Tubbal, waking from blissful reveries with a somewhat startled look, instinctively buttoned up his dinner jacket.

M. Fripponet responded in a hollow voice:

"Baudet!"

Baudet started violently.

"Excellency!"

"Let us advance."

But Mr. Pengwynne gracefully interposed.

"A moment, Monsieur, General and soldiers of Monte Vanco. May I so far presume?"

"In warfare we consider the opponent carefully before engaging him, and suit our tactics to his vulnerable points. Strength overwhelms weakness, but the weak, through guile, insidiously overcome the strong. All of you will at once recall the words of that great Chinese military expert K'ang Hsi who said, 'First surround the camp of the enemy with voluptuous music, so as to soften his heart. Can we do better than to take and amplify that hint, since we have here an enemy than whom none in the known world is more notoriously susceptible to pleasure?"

"Suppose that, instead of hurling ourselves bloodthirstily upon him, we approached him with a smile, as if we expected none but an amiable intention in his visit? Suppose we bade him welcome as would an honored host; suppose we disarmed his bluster with a fine counterfeited tenderness, threw open the wine shops, set music throbbing, hung garlands round his neck, linked a pretty girl on his arm and made the whole principality blaze out en fête? What result?"

"He is bewildered, enchanted, seduced into unexpected frolic. His weapons slip from his hands, his brain grows dizzy, his legs refuse to bear his freebooter's carcass longer. He sinks to earth; he sleeps! Behold, he is your prisoner, and you are all still alive!"

Quoth Mr. Tubbal to himself while turning up his eyes:

"When they are putting up statues to this fellow in the Mall of Central Park I shall be able to say I was the companion of his youth."

As for M. Fripponet, hurling himself into Mr. Pengwynne's arms he tried to kiss that gentleman. The faithful army of Monte Vanco gave forth a great groan of relief. Their regent, foiled in his osculatory attempt, completed their satisfaction by crying out to the most competent and dependable personage that they had ever seen:

"Ah, inestimable plenipotentiary of that great land of freedom! Carte blanche! I leave it all to you!"

To the two companies of French, their arms resumed, their tanks drawn up, their officers on the very point of leading them away, came through the twilight the sound of tramping feet, the jingle of haphazard accoutrements, the clanking of a chemical engine. The shadows midway of the gardens were resolved into a dark mass, which gave forth little silvery gleams. The army of Monte Vanco emerged cautiously from among the palms, drenched by the lawn, halted with alacrity while still a considerable distance off, and in distrustful attitudes gazed on the enemy. The encircling audience of amateurs in evening dress, their dinner appetites forgotten, pressed closer. Mr. Pengwynne, M. Fripponet and Mr. Tubbal advanced toward the French ranks.

The dusty mountain artillery, smothered in blanket rolls and cartridge boxes, leaning on their rifles in the jaunty attitudes of comic opera

brigands, cast from under their flat tam o' shanters of blue flannel glances of amiable curiosity. They had to a man that imminent look of good little dogs waiting but for a smile to burst into friendly barks and wag their tails.

Before each company stood a captain, and before all stood a major—a middle aged, gray mustached, distinguished looking gentleman in dark blue, with wasplike waist, slender legs encased in puttees blue blazer chest, an excellent upholstered seat, a sword, a monocle and a cigarette. His countenance was distinguished with that aplomb worn in perfection by Gallic veterans of many successfully waged wars of bullets and billets-doux. Of this personage Mr. Pengwynne with a bow calmly inquired:

"Monsieur is the commander of this splendid force?"

The Major, looking attentively at Mr. Pengwynne and at the phalanx behind him, said:

"Monsieur has reason."

"Then, sir, permit me, in the name of Monte Vanco, to welcome France, that dear neighbor, that kind elder sister, to the soil of this principality."

The Major was struck rigid by a sudden thought. He peered round him like a person just waking up; he cast over his shoulder a startled glance toward the French highway a hundred yards away across the border; he stared down at the lawn; gingerly he raised one foot and then the other, as if the ground were hot.

"Sapristi!" he ejaculated. It was borne upon him that he had invaded Monte Vanco.

Shrugging his shoulders remorsefully he stammered:

"Messieurs, what shall I say? You see in me, Major Houppé-Houppé, commanding two companies of the 623d Maritimes, on a practice march from Fort Mont Agel to Fort de la Revere. The way was long and dusty, my little fellows tired and hungry, the lovely lawns—"

But all the while Mr. Pengwynne was drowning out his voice in tones of oratorical rotundity:

"This signal honor gives excuse for the delay; what proper reception could have been prepared in less time? Not in another century, perhaps, will such a chance occur for national hospitality. Soldiers of France, Monte Vanco will see to it that you remember this so generous visit. Come, let the flags bend forward; let cordial bugle answer bugle, let the gamecock of Gaul approach in amity and lie down beside the—er—national bird, or animal, of Monte Vanco!"

"But—a thousand pardons, monsieur—my duties—"

At these ominous words a chill ran through the army of defence. His duties! Seizure and occupation, pillage and destruction, the tricolor waving over ruin! Ah, cruel, polished, bare-faced tyrant! All cast on Mr. Pengwynne an imploring look. He calmed them with a glance. He answered firmly:

"Sir, all other duties grow pale and small beside this larger one—the proffer of hospitality by one nation, the acceptance by another. To-night the very stars shall note great doings hereabouts. Lights, music, wine—"

A quiver at that last word ran through the dusty Gallic ranks.

"Mars doffs his brass, and—speaking metaphorically—sinks into the lap of Venus."

Major Houppé-Houppé pricked up his ears. Gazing round him in the dusk at the great circle of interested amateurs he discerned here and there light, shimmering stuffs (like spangled shoulder veils and corsages of golden tissue) that twinkled in vague beauty. Perhaps he remembered the celebratory, craggy fastnesses of Fort Mont Agel and Fort de la Revere. At any rate he became swiftly and in some subtle manner changed; surely his puttees took on a romantic curve, his long mustaches seemed more killingly curled up, his cap appeared to sit on his head more jauntily, no one could have expanded in a uniform more debonairly than did he. With a glance at his wrist watch, tenderly he said:

"Monsieur, gentlemen of Monte Vanco, I have not the heart to deny you or ourselves. On this charming occasion let us spare an hour from business to festivity. But—a thousand pardons—allow me, Capt. Mesembryanthem!"

Continued on Sixteenth Page.



"Monsieur Fripponet."

A short, bulky, bullet-headed young man, wearing backward like an inkly toothbrush, bounced forth with a clatter and saluted.

"And Capt. Zagale!"

A lean, melancholy, poetical looking young man, his chin embellished with a blond virgin beard cut swallowtail, floating toward them made a graceful and languid gesture of acknowledgment.

Then, cried Major Houppé-Houppé, niere to the two companions in a voice like the rasp of a tough plank at the sawmill:

"Ah! Brum! Brum! Stack arms! Break ranks!"

And finally to Mr. Pengwynne with a total change of manner—that is, ever so gently:

"Sir, France is your hands!"

"Trapped!" hissed Mr. Tubbal in the ear of M. Fripponet. And the two forces, like unacquainted awkward children smitten with bashfulness, sidling together mingled warily. A prolonged patter of applause ran round the circle of spectators.

At the bottom of the village street stood the homely but commod